

# WYCOMBE WANDERERS ARE CHAMPIONS AFTER A PHOTO FINISH

With two weeks to go in the Championship, the top of the Rothmans Isthmian League looked like this:

	Pld	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Enfield	...	40	28	7	5	74	25
Wycombe W.	38	26	9	3	88	29	87
Dagenham	38	27	5	6	85	36	86

and the remaining fixtures couldn't possibly have been stage-managed to leave a more exciting climax to the season:—

Wycombe W. v.	Enfield
Tooting v.	Wycombe W.
Dagenham v.	Hitchin T.
Wycombe W. v.	Bishop's Stortford
Enfield v.	Dagenham
Wycombe W. v.	Dagenham
Tooting & M v.	Dagenham

Enfield, by dropping a number of surprising points against comparatively mediocre opposition, had enabled Wycombe and Dagenham to put in a late challenge. However, with the points in the bag, the Middlesex club were still just favourites at this stage.

Everyone present at the Wycombe and Enfield confrontation must have been impressed with the full-blooded physical battle which was fought out, with great skill and pace for the full ninety minutes, with hardly a moment's bad spirit. All that was good in the sponsored leagues was on show, and at the end we were left with the memory of a brilliant run and shot from Enfield's Dennis Gill which hit a post and could have made all the difference — but it didn't, and a 0-0 draw was overall a fair result.

Brian Lee's men then gained a tense 1-1 draw at Tooting where having taken the lead late in the game through Horseman, they surrendered two points when the home side converted a penalty three minutes later.

Wycombe were now three points behind Enfield with a game in hand and it was Dagenham's turn to put in a challenge. This they did in dramatic fashion by scoring seven goals without reply against Hitchin Town!

'Daggers' had enjoyed tremendous form in mid-season and had done well to recover from disappointing defeats in the F.A. Trophy and London Senior Cup. Their spirits had been kept up by their manager Lawrie Wilkinson and coach Gerry Ward and their forwards were in rampaging form despite a long hard season. Mal Harkins, who broke the club goal-scoring record during the season with 61 goals (37 in the League) scored twice,

with Ken Gray (2), Fox, Holder and an own goal completing the rout. This victory followed a success at Leatherhead, so the Essex club moved on to Enfield with spirits high.

The first game between the 'Old' Enfield and Dagenham had left a lot of ill-will and a few 'mysterious' injuries earlier in the season. So League and club officials kept their fingers crossed hoping there wouldn't be a repeat performance. They needn't have worried! Ted Hardy's team with a strong code of discipline turned on one of the season's greatest performances and the Daggers were swept aside. Dagenham's sporting secretary, Ernie

Collier, admitted it could well have been more than 4-1 on the night. The scorers on this occasion were Kenny Gaine (2), Derek Baker and Brian Wilson for Enfield, and Mal Harkins for Dagenham. Now Enfield could only wait for Wycombe who had to win both their matches 'in hand' without reducing their goal average to retain the Championship.

The next evening it was Bishop's Stortford's turn to visit Wycombe where a large and anxious crowd were kept waiting for a goal until the last twenty minutes. Wycombe were then awarded a penalty and Dave Alexander relieved the tension by scoring. Steve Perrin added a couple more to make sure of the three points and a £40 bonus. So the stage was set for Dagenham's visit to Loakes Park on the last Saturday of the season.

The atmosphere was electric as a crowd of 4,000 pushed 'The Blues' forward, willing them to retain the title. Victory without conceding a goal would give them the championship but a win by any other score caused all sorts of mathematical problems, and of course a draw gave Enfield the trophy and if Dagenham won, they could still finish level with Enfield if they beat Tooting in their last match — what a climax to a season!

## HERO SEARLE

For 85 minutes the match and the title hung in the balance and as the final whistle came closer, Wycombe's chances seemed to be slipping away. They had set up and missed a number of opportunities, with the tension and general urgency nagging at the team's nerves. Then, with the ball played into touch, deep in the Dagenham half on the 'top side', Steve Perrin took a quick throw and Keith Searle caught the 'Daggers' defence by surprise, moved into the penalty area and placed a superb shot wide of Ian Huntley.

The ground erupted and Searle was mobbed in triumph.

Dagenham eventually finished the season after 78 matches with a record of W: 50, D: 14, L: 14, Goals for 189, Against 87!

Wycombe Wanderers had won their fourth League triumph in five years, and their undefeated home run had been extended to 51 matches! In two seasons they had only received two cautions and had scored 189 League goals! Brian Lee, assisted by John Reardon, had dedicated himself to produce a side playing attractive and disciplined football and he had been rewarded in the best possible way. Indeed the high standards that Brian had insisted upon and which have been associated with the first two championship-winning sides in the League since sponsorship, will give future winners something worthwhile to live up to.